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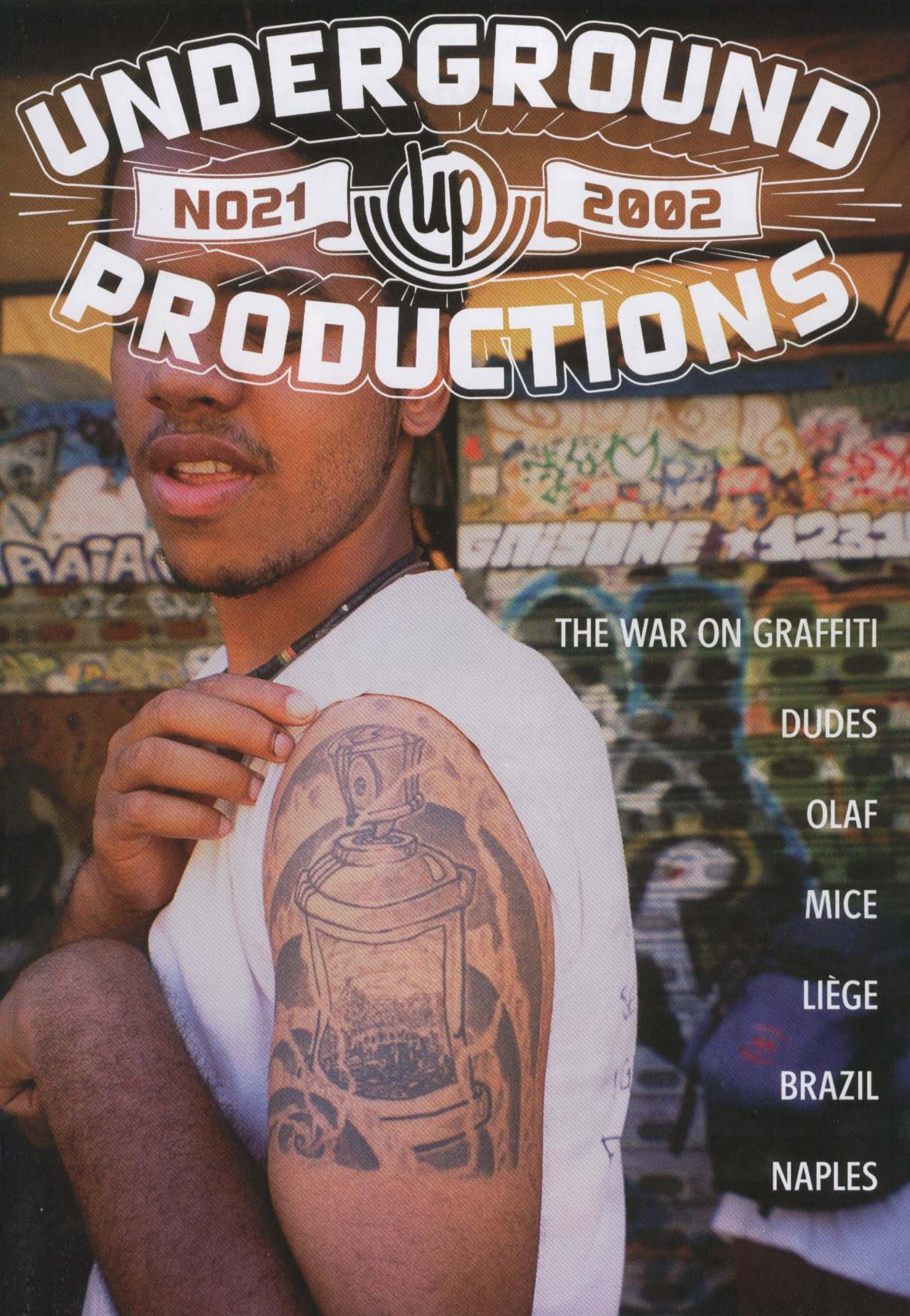
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Cover Photo by Josefin Adolfsson. Writer in Rio de Janeiro shows his tatoo. From the Brazil-report, pages 4-7.

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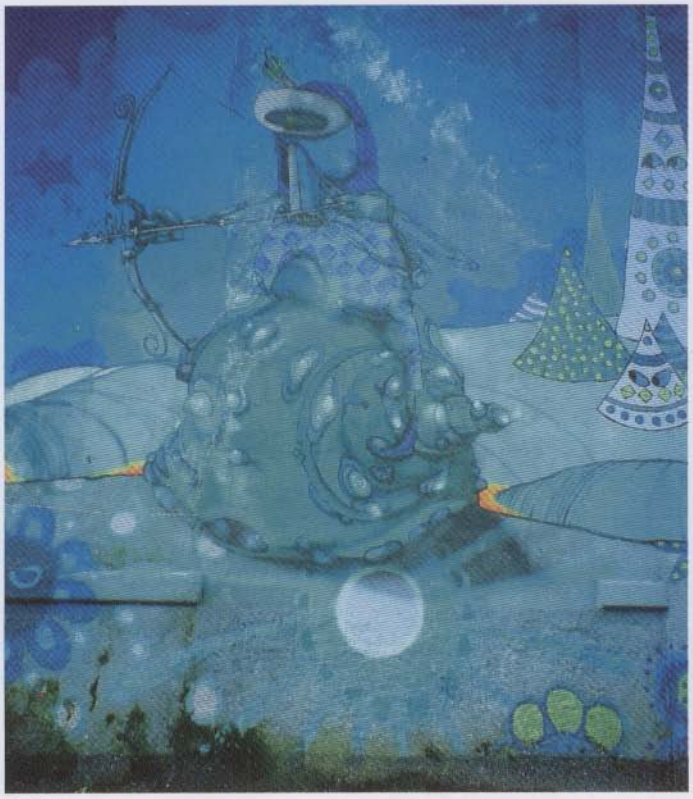


Os Gemeos

Piece by Reis made for some kids who use to play on the streets close to the wall.

Children playing in the alleys of Rochina.

Graffiti solidarity in the favelas of Brazil

"Okay, do you need to go to the bathroom? Better say now!" Bea and Reis grab hold of me. The sun is setting and we are headed for Rocinha, which for years has been one of South America's largest *favelas* – a huge shanty town milling at one of the edges of southern Rio.

This week, almost all of the clandestine water pipes and sewers seem to have been blocked. The further you live within the valleys, the worse it gets, and there has been a blockage at Bea and Reis's place for two months now. "The whole toilet is full of shit," says Bea. "It's sort of started mounting on its own, the floor is full of it and the kitchen is blocked up too. The only more or less dry place is the hall, so right now we live and sleep there."

Rocinha is not only the largest and most populated *favela*, but also one of those that have the most accomplished and expanded infrastructure. Rocinha has its own schools, children's organisations, cafés and restaurants, most of which is built by the drugs mafia and its assets.

Despite what one might think, the drugs mafia, in Rocinha in any case, is intimately bound to the local community. Moreover, in Rocinha, the mafia is unusually united and spends much time in buying and smuggling expensive weapons and using a mild form of propaganda on the inhabitants, as exemplified by their handing out toys to children at Christmas and giving food to families in dire straits. All this to create a greater sense of togetherness, to hold the unwanted at bay.

For several years, the police have fruitlessly tried to invade the *favela*. Their last affort resulted in a huge bloodbath, despite their having sought the assistance of the military. Many envoys of the state died, and the squadron penetrated no further than two blocks into Rocinha.

As in many Brazilian *favelas*, hip-hop culture thrives in Rocinha. But it is not the glamorous or gangsta-type variety that has gained the greatest currency, but rather the social and day-to-day form. When Bea started her break groups, for instance, she was very careful to see to it that each group should consist of people from different hills and slopes of Rocinha in order to avoid conflict or competition that could threaten the harmony of the *favela* itself. Instead they try to keep it together as well as they can, and travel to Lapa in central Rio de Janeiro to battle against other *favelas*. In Rocinha, breakdancing enjoys such an exalted social status that one can organise lessons or battles during class hours. It is the same way with graffiti. Reis, who is one of Rocinha's most prominent painters, explains that graffiti is a way of creating unity in the area and not just among other writers or hip-hoppers, but also the aged, very young children and those who are not interested in hip-hop at all. In the narrow, dirty alleys of Rocinha, a colourful figurative painting on the wall has become a sign of reparation. It is not unusual to see pieces that have a direct link to the houses that they are painted on, or the people living in the area. One often sees paintings or portraits of playing children, and if one looks carefully, one recognises the features of the children running around on the street in front of the piece.

In the same way, most people in Brazil make the distinction between graffiti and *pixacao* (tags done in a special Brazilian style), not least through the huge campaign mounted by the State and Government, which has mostly been directed towards impoverished and vulnerable areas. It is a negative information campaign, which tries to depict tag culture as destructive, ignorant and slum-creating, in comparison to figurative painting, pieces or throw-ups. Many of those who call themselves graffiti writers today also refer to their previous occupation as pure vandalism. In many cases they have been able to distance themselves from the criminality that flourishes amongst the rival tag gangs by dedicating themselves to figurative painting and the elevated social status it entails. Furthermore, the police do not need to use brutality – in relative Brazilian terms – against the taggers, as the harsh social structure often sees to this. In some cases, in certain parts of the country (I encounter it in the poor areas of Rio de Janeiro, Recife and Fortaleza), the police do not even issue fines to taggers.

Instead they catch them, spray their heads with a special kind of paint and let them loose to run the gauntlet of the neighbourhoods, where

< Arcade, Sao Paolo. The main area for underground culture in Sao Paolo.

An abandoned, closed park, surrounded by fences. Situated next to an approach to Recife.

Cimples, Dose – Cidade Curitiba

they are hunted and lynched to the enjoyment of all.

"It's sick," says Galo, former leader of the C.D. crew (*Comando dos Disordeiros*) in Recife, who today only does what he calls "real graffiti". "Before, I used to get beaten up all the time, and a friend of mine had his arm broken off. But now that I have started painting figuratively, people bring me gifts and admire me. My family, who still live in the *favela* where I grew up, have a whole different social status since I started painting graffiti. *Real graffiti*." But opinions differ, at least in the world of graffiti. Especially if you move up to the middle classes or the higher echelons and intellectual circles of Brazilian class society.

"Of course *pixacao* is graffiti. It is a great part of our culture," say Os Gemeos, the shooting starts from Sao Paolo. "Those who do not understand that have not got their finger on the pulse of hip-hop culture and don't know what they're talking about," continue the twins who now exhibit in galleries all over the Western World. Os Gemeos started in the hip-hop scene, but today prefer to be associated with the broader art world

Os Gemeos also produce one of Brazil's most prestigious graffiti magazines, Fiz (which in direct translation means "I shall do this, and continue to do so"). When I ask them if they would consider publishing pictures of favela artists or writers from Northern Brazil, they give me a strange look and shake their heads. "Nope. They don't cut it. Their art isn't interesting enough, they're just amateurs."

Thus, different views. Different experiences and conditions. Some can afford to analyse the meaning of art while others try not to go to pieces. And the "amateurish" *favela* artists in turn think that painters such as Os Gemeos are snobby and high-handed. For many writers rooted in the lower classes, hip-hop and graffiti are mostly about solidarity.

For the same reason, one often encounters little mountains of throw-ups around Brazil, especially in the *favelas* and Sao Paolo. It is a sort of ascending system where you paint beside and above others, rather than go over them. Galo describes it as a huge library, an archive that gets its worth in the way it is put together, the mutual respect and wholeness rather than the quality of each separate part or lone throw-up.

But despite the fact that graffiti in Brazil is socially accepted in most residential areas, not least because of the country's long-standing tradition of mural painting, it is still not without risks to write. The police still patrol the areas that have become hot spots for Brazilian writers: the huge, multi-filed motorways leading into the cities and the so-called *rodovarias*, connecting points for traffic in the outskirts of the towns. And if you don't get beaten up, you are often robbed by these desperate civil servants. For the same reasons, writing on trains constitutes a direct threat to your life.

"The train police are the worst," says Galo. "They have rifles, pistols and machine guns, and they use them. Officially they shoot to wound, by shooting the knee-caps, for instance, but all the writers who have encountered them know that they shoot to kill."

A guy I meet in Rio de Janeiro, who doesn't want to give me his name, tells me that his best friend was shot to death two years ago while they were painting trains. He pulls up his T-shirt, displaying a huge scar in the abdominal region.

"There wasn't even a prosecution. When we went out of the courtroom, the policeman grabbed me and whispered to me that he would take better aim the next time. That he'd get me the way he got my friend."

I meet a stately, drunken prosecutor in a café in Rio de Janeiro. He seems worried and sad. "According to the law, it is of course forbidden to use violence, especially to shoot to kill. But the way the justice community is today, we are completely powerless. Mostly we are not even told that someone has been killed or injured, because the police and perpetrators protect each other. What's even worse is that hardly any crimes are reported, because people have so little confidence in the system." Later that evening, two street kids, a girl of ten and a boy of seven, are shot to death only two blocks from where I was sitting with the prosecutor. The official version is that they were in the process of robbing a tourist. A friend who witnessed the incident tells me that the children came running down the street, empty-handed. He says they were shot in the back. The next day I search the papers for a report but find nothing. At the police station in the vicinity, I am told that they know nothing and have heard nothing.

For the same reason, most graffiti writers simply choose to work by

Galo and Caveira by the tracks outside Recife.

day, to maximise the number of witnesses to any eventual incident. Even though it may not lead to a prosecution, it will at least create a climate of distrust of the police among the witnesses, a vote of no confidence that the police can ill afford. In the same second that the middle classes lose the belief that the police state protects them from violence, the police, guards and military lose their prerogative to take the law into their own hands.

"Graffiti is my religion. I believe in the inner strengths of the individual, I believe in Good, I believe in solidarity and unity," says Gais, a writer who owns a small graffiti shop in central Rio de Janeiro. As many other writers I have encountered in Brazil, he sports some very special tattoos. "Check this out," he says. "Look, it's the hills of Rio de Janeiro, all the *favelas*, beaches, mountains and God is watching over them! All is contained in a gigantic spray can! It's creation! I am certain that if Jesus had been alive today, he would be a graffiti writer!"

Life, death and, mainly, God, are always present. Gais hasn't been back to his *favela* in three days; tonight he has slept on a mattress next to my bed, because there is a full-blown war outside on the street. Before he finally falls asleep, he asks me if I believe in life after death. "Do you think Paradise is cool and friendly like your country, and that there are many trains to paint there? Do you think I'll go there, if I am kind and show solidarity?"

It is pitch black in Rocinha. Street lighting is out of the question. It is past eleven at night, and Bea, Reis and I are sitting in a small open street bar getting drunk on cloying sweet over-fermented wine. We sit quietly, watching the dark shadows milling past on the narrow street. Suddenly three big guys appear out of the throng. Three heavies armed with kalashnikovs, one of whom has two hand grenades secured to his belt. "There she is, there she is!" calls one of them to the others. "Hey, are you the Swede?" Before I have time to squeak out an answer one of them has sat down next to me. "You see, here in Rocinha we have much more nice things than graffiti paintings. For instance, we've just got new bazookas from the Middle East, and we are just itching to try them out, but the police won't even come in with helicopters. Hey, finish your wine and come with us, don't you want to check it out?"

Josefine Adolfsson

Detail from a piece made by Os Gemeos, close to their house.

A freshly painted subway on the Linea 1, by Robe, Eroine and more.

Trainspotting in Naples

Even before arriving in Naples, I have felt the humid climate. It is early August, and daytime temperature approaches 40 degrees centigrade. Naples lies in Southern Italy, next to the Vesuvius volcano. It is located in Italy's centre for both business and tourism, and with its 1.2 million inhabitants counts as Italy's third largest city.

I travel here with a friend from Sicily, and it is he who has contacts in Naples. We get off the train and make our way to the arrivals hall. There we are to meet Eroine, a true native of Naples, a Neapolitan. I start to look around myself nervously; all I have been told before my trip to Naples is to hold on to my bags. To be fair, that is all I was told before going to Rome too, but Naples is said to be even worse.

Eroine turns up after a little while and we take the metro linea 2, also called the Metropolitana FS. It is run by the national company Ferrovio dello Stato/Tren Italia, and also shares tracks with Eurostar and various long-distance trains.

I observe that the trains don't look like the subways I am used to, more like express trains. But my Italian friends think of it as an subway.

When we get off we are in the centre of Naples. It feels very different from Milan in Northern Italy, where lifestyle and architecture are more reminiscent of Northern Europe. Naples is all small streets and alleyways, balconies and drying laundry, milling with people by day.

Now evening is approaching, the sun has gone down, but it is still warm. Tags abound in this part of town. I also see some throwups and street pieces. I noticed a few murals on my way from the central station, but globally see few tags in Naples.

Later that evening I have been recommended to sleep at Robe's place. As we have an hour to kill before the night bus arrives, Robe makes some silver footprints with a stencil he has. I take some pictures, but the light is insufficient. We do our best to communicate while we wait. As in the rest of Italy, the command of English is not great. It works with the help of sign language and my limited Spanish.

We are pretty much alone except for the odd car. By day, traffic is a mess. Eroine, with a twinkle in his eye, says that traffic would flow easier if it weren't for the girls. Drivers get too distracted.

The Napolitan graffiti scene is relatively small. Eroine thinks that the number of active writers is of about 20. Those who are, however, have done quite a lot.

I see pictures of a wholetrain done on linea 2. They inform me that it is the first to be done on that line. When they took the pictures, one of them pulled the emergency brake so that they would have enough time to photograph their pieces. Normally paintings on linea 2 can roll for several days.

Alot of the trains who run on the Cumanaline are completely painted. Only the windows seems to get cleaned.

Two times Hegs on the Vesuvianaline

The other line, linea 1, or the Metropolitana Collinare, is privately run, and essentially free of graffiti. The yellow trains that run on it are under heavier guard.

But guards are not always the problem for train writers in Naples. Some yards are placed in areas ridden with crime and poverty. "If you get lost there, you've had it," says my Sicilian friend.

Apart from the two metro lines are two Commuter-like trains, the Cumana line that follows the coast and the Vesuviana that links the city to Vesuvius. The Cumana line trains are covered in graffiti; it is as though they only ever wash the windows. Many of the paintings look very dirty.

Robe informs me that you can see paintings on the Vesuviana line too, though not to the same extent. After having seen a few trains roll by, we cross the tracks to make our way to the adjacent beach. One has to pay to gain access to it, but Robe arranges cheaper passage for us by pointing out that we live in the neighbourhood.

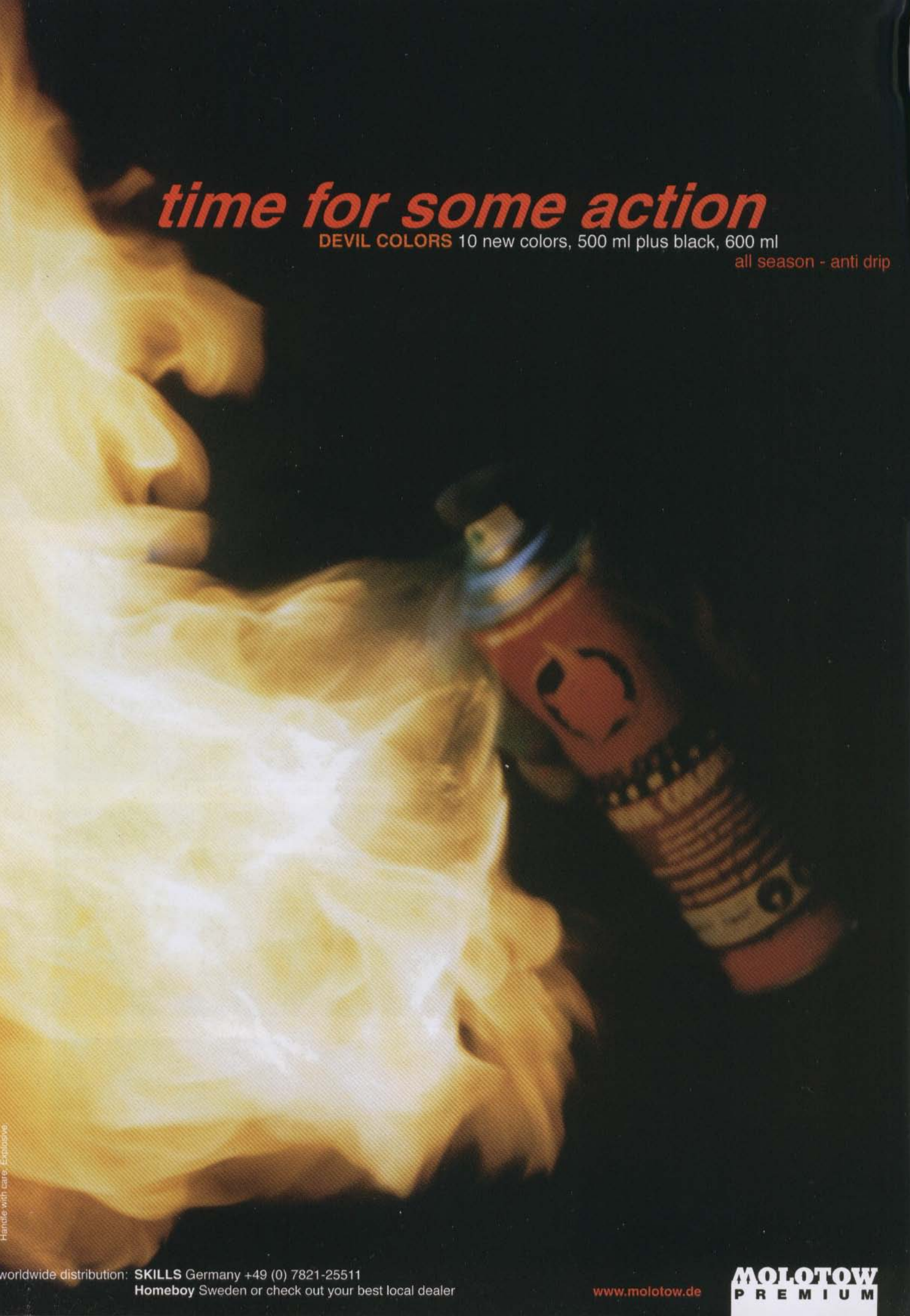
Torkel

Whole Train on a four cars subway, Linea 2. Hegs, Eroine, Sure, Robe and Zeal.

Roxen, Top To Bottom on the Vesuvianaline

Kaf – subway Linea 2

Zeal – subway Linea 1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Liège, summer 2002. At the right side, along the tracks you can see pieces saying Tonus and Pfd.

Graffiti blossoms in gloomy Liège

Liège is an industrial city of approximately one million inhabitants in the francophone part of Belgium, specialised in metal. A friend of mine described it as a nice place to visit, for a day. "After that, you've seen it all, there's no reason to stay." Deciding to find out the truth, I took the train to Liège.

I was met at the station by Robot and Recto, two writers from the city. With a broad grin, Recto says: "Welcome to Belgium!"
They both give a very decent impression, and I can't help feeling welcome. We deposit my bag and go to a pub.
"In Liège you can do pretty much whatever you like," says Recto. "Nobody minds if you do a tag on a wall, or smoke a joint. There are hardly any jobs, so most of us are unemployed. I've lived on benefits for years."

Despite his supposedly lazy lifestyle, he has elevated his graffiti to a material plane. In his flat, I see a plastic Recto piece. It looks like a toy and is packaged in a box that could contain a Transformer. He is developing his own so-called Recto Design*. After having discussed such subjects as football and Belgian beer, I am delivered to Kes. Together with Kes, and Play from France, I amble through Liège.
After a few hours in the town, I begin to get used to its pleasantly peaceful ambiance.
The question is how Liège could have developed graffiti styles that are unconnected to the rest of Belgium. In later years, different magazines have displayed paintings from Liège that have most contemporary graffiti beat. Paintings by the like of Apollo, Astro, Blond or Robot.
In the centre of Liège, I take pictures of various tags, many of which are pretty sharp. Over the course of our meanderings, Kes occasionally runs back and forth, putting up stickers. He also collects old shoes he finds on the street. He tells me that he takes them home and tags them, and sometimes puts in a tape or a plastic necklace, then ties the laces up. Finally, he throws them up so that they will hang on an electric cable or phone line in the city. "When they fall down after a while," he says, "they will be a kind of gift for the person who finds them."
A day or so later, I have followed Apollo to look at some of his

Apollo, Head, Over and Nhr painted in Liège 2001.

Almost three windowdown Wholecars with pieces saying Clm, Clm, Apollo, Hulk, Turn, Osta, Obot, Tma, Tma, T?c, Robot, G old, Tma, Gap – Liège 1999

pictures. He produces a couple of plastic carrier bags full of photographs. Most of them are of trains he has painted, primarily in Belgium.

He tells me that sometimes, when they are painting trains, they have the time to do two or three pieces each. "But now they've instituted a force to guard the trains, B-Security. When we met them there was a force of about ten of them. So now it's tougher to write."

By day I follow my newly found friends around Liège and meet a number of different people, most of which are writers. The graffiti scene in Liège is among the biggest in Belgium. Robot says it is at least as big as the Brussels scene. "There are easily a hundred or so active writers here."

Having spent a few days in Liège, it is time for me to go, happy to have given it more than one day.

Torkel

*Check out Recto's plastic pieces at: **www.typoflex.com**

Clay and Smack tags in Liège 2002

Kes and Dirt shoes, 2002

Kes putting up stickers

Ers – Liège 2002

Misery – Liège 2002

Honet, Recto, Fars, Rob, Posh, Jaba, Fab 74 – Liège 2002

Jaba, Tonus and Pro – Liège 2002

Recto and Supe throwups in Liège 2002

Astro – Liège 2002

A married couple made by Head, Apollo, Video, Prinz, Over and Stud – Liège 2002

Prinz, Nutmeg, Dead, Astro, Nitro, Fume and Stud – Liège 2002

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Dudes: Rockin' it – Stockholm flat subway car 1989

Dudes: "Of course it's a protest"

I'm a writer, that's all there is to it. I'm a part of it. That way of thinking infuses everything. If I'm hungry and am making a sandwich, the bread is the rollered wall. Then I add feta cheese, tomatoes and leek, until I have a finished piece.

Dudes started writing in 1984 after having seen Style Wars on TV. Then he was 12. Today he is 30, but graffiti still influences his whole frame of reference. Dudes fell in love with graffiti, as he understood afterwards. He soon started to systematically bomb certain tramcar lines. For a while, he had tags on every seat on the lines to Guldheden and the Sahlgren hospital in Gothenburg.

"I am fascinated by the systematic quality of writing, it is one of the most beautiful things there is. The thought is somehow more beautiful than the tag. The person who had made it, where it is, and how it was planned. It's definitely the best thing I know. And if it looks nice on top of that, you're happy, life blooms."

In the summer of 1987, he broke his leg, and had to take it easy. He sat indoors sketching a lot, and his home became a hangout for writers. Dudes developed his style and writing became increasingly important to him.

His love of freedom and the camaraderie with other writers are still what drives him. But it is no longer as much about fame as it was at the start. Graffiti writing has become a relaxing hobby, and his seven-year-old son gets most of the attention. Moreover, he has run the record label Stilleben since 1998 and produces electro under names such as Luke Eargoggle, Monkey Shop and Catnip.

When Dudes started with graffiti, he listened to electro hip-hop by Africa Bambaataa, Hashim and Herbie Hancock. But he lost interest when hip-hop music developed in other directions.

"I'm not your classical hip-hopper. I'm into graffiti. There's a lot of good hip-hop music, but the attitude around it has got nothing to do with me. There's too much talk about who is the coolest and who smokes most spliff. But I like Kool Keith and love a lot of what Leo has done. (Leo is a rapper from Gothenburg who won the prize for best Swedish MC at the Swedish Hip-Hop Awards in 2002.) It's more abstract and doesn't follow the same old patterns."

The music Dudes himself makes is very reminiscent of his graffiti. It is hard, metallic and scaled-down, but simultaneously warm and beautiful. For Dudes, the similarity between music and graffiti is greater than the difference.

"When I make music, it's an empty surface, just like a wall. You roll it and then decide what colours you are going to use. Music is just the same. When the whole studio is closed off and you turn on the power, you have a wall. Then you decide on your roller colour, background and style. Instead of colour tones you have sound tones. From that, you create just in the same way as when you write graffiti, but on a DAT tape rather than a wall. So it's exactly the same thing to me," says Dudes. Whether he is making music or graffiti, it is always about the same thing: style.

"Since I'm a style freak, style is what I want to express. I want everyone to have style. How you walk, how you eat, how you paint. Have a good style as a human. I like people who spend a little time on style. They make me flip. I love hearing stylish music from label that's done maybe 15 or 16 releases. You buy the record without having heard it first because you know what style it is. I'm crazy about that, and it's what I strive for with my label. People who really like it shouldn't have to listen before they buy a record. Because they know it has a connection with the previous record."

Dudes says he knows he's got style. He can't see his own style but can feel it.

Funk, hiphop - A sketch from 1985 Dudes' mother saved

Gothenburg 1995

"It's something inside you. How you move as a writer, as a person, that's where your style is. No one has exactly the same pattern of movements as someone else. Style is who you are and that's what's so beautiful. When you see someone walking you can feel: 'that's exactly the S he did the other day. Here he is.' It's often about small margins, degrees and angles in a tag."

Dudes believes that it is difficult to see your own style since it is not always agreeable to look at yourself from the outside. But he can find that someone else has a nice style, and if he likes the person who does a painting, he often likes the painting more. Dudes tells us about one of the first graffiti writers in Gothenburg. He used the name Jack Nepacha and was a few years older than Dudes.

"I remember his pencil sketches were some of the greatest stuff I've seen. I know it's because he was like an idol when I was a kid. When Dwane and I were up in Rannebergen (a suburb of Gothenburg), where he lived, we passed his balcony. It was completely sprayed to bits and that was so incredibly cool. He was sitting outside with a friend and folded a whole pizza and ate it. You just felt you loved him. Man, he had style. His graffiti became ten times better when he folded that pizza."

Under his aliases, Dudes creates electro music in different styles. Some of it is very scaled-down and hard, while other bits are lighter electronic disco. Similarly, he has used different tags for different areas in graffiti. He hopes to support himself and his son with his music in future, but mainly sees it as a calling. Just as the style of a graffiti writer is an expression of his person, he says that he can't make any difference between himself and his music. For Dudes, music is a complement to his graffiti, another way to channel his driving force to express style.

"It's pure love, interest, and some sort of driving force that must have a destination. A record release is a destination for something. Once you've done that, you can't do any more. It's released and finished. Just like a photo of a painting. It's definite, it's done, now there's proof for yourself. Then if other people like it, that's fantastic," says Dudes.

Sometimes a graffiti painting can directly affect his music.

"When I see paintings a rhythm can awaken within me. Speed; or if something seems to be lumbering along, it can give you an idea to programme the drums differently."

Early on, Dudes got on the wrong side of the law, not just because of his love for graffiti. He was involved in thefts and burglaries. As usual, he dedicated 100% of himself to what he was doing. When he was 18, he was caught for a series of things unrelated to graffiti. At the same time, he completely stopped writing.

"When I was arrested, that was the worst thing that ever happened to me, probably still today. A room with a lock. It's completely against the way I want my life. But the main reason for my changing was the way it almost broke my mother. I couldn't handle it. She is the one who gave me the possibility. Without her I wouldn't have been able to do anything."

To avoid falling into his old patterns, Dudes stayed at home, dedicating himself to other things with the same fervour as he had lent to graffiti. "I read and exercised a lot, and took care of my schoolwork for the first time. Then I bought a decoder and watched TV serials. I started following *Glamour* with my mother. She still watches it today but I gave up a long time ago. Soon graffiti came back. I couldn't stay away. And I'm happy that I have the gift to understand how beautiful it is."

Dudez – Stuvsta Hall of Fame, Stockholm 1989

Dudes, Gone, Uma crew – Gothenburg 1997

Activ 85 by Dudes, Utopia, one of his first planned pieces – Guldheden, Gothenburg 1985

Dudes

Fresh – Gothenburg 1986

Dudes – Cologne, Germany 1998

Nowadays, Dudes paints legal walls. He says he'll always be a graffiti writer but doesn't see himself as an active writer despite the fact that he paints regularly. According to Dudes, tagging is as important an element as doing pieces for the active writer. But since he has a child, he wants to avoid the authorities and usually avoids anything too risky. And for Dudes it no longer matters if he can choose the exact location of his painting. But illegal graffiti is still at the heart of it.

"Just for the moment, when you do it, it matters whether it's legal or not. If it's illegal, it's fantastic. That is the whole thing, after all. But in the main it doesn't matter. It's good that the possibility to paint legally exists in Gothenburg, and for me personally, it doesn't matter that much now. But I love the ones who are writing illegally. Illegal graffiti is the best thing I know. It's total freedom. To go out and do it yourself and completely choose your location. I love it when painted train cars come rolling down the tracks. It warms me and my heart beats harder every time. I'd like to give the ones who did it a big hug. They are showing that rules are nonsense, that's the love.

A lot of people would say that it's the complete opposite of love when you paint on public property such as a tramcar. After all, it does cost money to remove it.

"It doesn't work in a so-called yin-yang system. That doesn't correspond with the way I see things. Someone smoking cigarettes is also harmful to society in the end. You have to account for everything if you are going to start thinking that way," says Dudes, who thinks there should be space for different types of people.

If Dudes mainly uses graffiti to express style, it is also a means of protest.

"Of course it's a protest. Structures that are built so that everyone must conform to them can never be completely okay because everybody's so different. But it's also the adrenaline kick you're after when you're out with others you trust. It's such an enjoyment to feel a bit professional every now and then. In and out quickly, and then off your painting rolls. It's beautiful."

Despite the fact that his role as a parent prevents Dudes from writing as much as he used to, he doesn't think fatherhood conflicts with graffiti.

"No, it's simpler. From an inspirational point of view. Legally it's a bit harder. But children also have to do with graffiti. It starts with a blank, you meet a girlfriend, you have kids and there's the piece. It's your masterpiece and you'll never be able to do it again. You have to be there and take care of it all the time. I'd like to think that having children has freed my brain a bit. You can see from all children that we are complete from the beginning. All the complicated stuff is something we've invented as adults. 150 bills come through the letterbox and it feels remote from the life I have with my son. We'll be all right with love and a bit of food. I teach him things like table manners, to behave with his elders and to be attentive to small things. Like my mother and grandmother taught me. He teaches me what I've lost touch with. The most valuable things we have: freedom, play and simplicity."

Like with graffiti?

"Yes, I feel that way about everything. The whole of my life. Life is graffiti."

Björn Almqvist

Model by Dudes 1989

LOOPTROOP
THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES
PROMOE ★ SUPREME ★ COS.M.I.C ★ EMBEE
THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES
FEATURING THE HIT SINGLES
"LOOPTROOPLAND"
& "FLY AWAY"
(((DVSG.023)))

Alek and his tame crow.

For Olaf, nothing was impossible

On July 7th 2002, 20-year-old Aleksander Pielecha died. He was travelling through Europe and was in Vienna, the capital city of Austria. Aleksander, or Alek as he was also called, was better known by his sobriquets "Olaf" and "Yxa". Alek was one of Stockholm's most energetic graffiti writers and is sorely missed.

Alek's close friend Tony:

In early July 2002, Ligisd and I were walking through the Old town section of Stockholm. Ligisd was talking on his phone and I was looking around, reading AE-7DC, which was written on a wall. Then he turns to me and says:

"Guess who died yesterday?" And answers himself: "Olaf."

Everything stops. It seems like an eternity. A moment ago the weather was fine, but now it was greyer and colder than ever. Last winter, Olaf became a mainstay in my day-to-day life. Now he's gone.

It is October, and I am riding the Commuter train to the train's terminus, Märsta. Along the track are loads of surfaces that have been adorned by paintings by 7DC and Olaf during my time as a writer. Today hardly anything is left. Those few paintings that remain are destroyed. I see grey concrete rising above the rails, not a jot left. Once again I feel the empty space left by my friend.

At the station I meet Hanna, Olaf's mother. She calls him Alek, short for his Polish name Aleksander. I hand her a framed photograph representing two commuter cars with six Olaf paintings. Six friends of Alek's made it the day after they found out.

Alek and Hanna moved to Märsta from Poland in 1993, when Alek was twelve years old. On his first day at school, Alek met Micke. It started in the break room.

"I was trying to show off and start a fight with the new boy, but Alek stood his ground. A teacher had to separate us. From that time on we were best friends," says Micke.

They were always together, and one day they saw the graffiti film

> "It's not with sadness I say he's dead, it's with joy I say I knew him", Tony

"Style Wars". They were impressed, and immediately made their way to the train lay-up in Märsta to search for spray cans. When they had enough, they painted their first wall: "RIP", it said.

Hanna gives me tea and shows me pictures: Alek at Christmas with Santa Claus recurs many times. We reminisce about Alek.

"Once, during Alek's sixth year, when we still lived in Poland, he found a crow with a broken wing outside our home. He had such a love of animals he brought it home," says Hanna. "He spent hours making a house for it with his Lego. It stayed with us for a month until it was well enough to be let into the wild again."

We laugh and smile, but the large hole in my chest still makes itself known. "Hole in the soul," Alek once wrote on a painting.

Micke relates how they carried on with graffiti. Alek developed quickly, surpassing Micke, and they slid apart after three or four years. He says that many young people in Märsta fall into crime.

"Graffiti must have been what saved him," he says, and Hanna agrees: "Who does it hurt that it says Olaf in colourful letters on the outside of a train that people only travel inside anyway?"

In 1997, when Alek was 16, he met the next person who was to be important to him both as a friend and a writer. Clis relates:

Olaf doing a Subway backjump – Stockholm, May 2002

Yxa by Olaf along a commuter train line – Stockholm 2001

Olaf 7DC – Poland

Mom by Olaf, Mother Day 1999

Yxa by Olaf on a commuter train – Stockholm 2001

"I got to know Alek on the train, and after that it felt natural that we should start writing together. As a person, he was very much apart and hard to get hold of. He wouldn't let anyone close to him."

"Alek was satisfied with those he knew, cared for his friends and wanted what was best for all. He had an ability to appreciate all sorts

> "Rest in peace and don't worry, you are always resting in my mind", Clis.

of things. He might, for instance, sit and check out the moss growing on the stones as we were about to paint a train, and comment on how cool it was that it could grow there, while the rest of us sat shaking our cans and checking our watches."

"A month before he was taken away from us, he told me that he wanted to move back to Poland and open a photo shop. He always thought of things and was positive."

"When we were writing the most, he said that since our crew was called 7DC, Seven Days Crew, we should go ahead and represent this. At one time after that we did at least seven pieces a week."

"The funniest thing he did was in Stockholm last autumn. We were doing an eight-car colour wholetrain on the subway*. Alek and I shared a car. He was most satisfied with the whole, the experience, the painting, the getaway and the result: a colour wholetrain.

We all met up in the morning and went en masse. We had full bags and robber's hoods. We finished painting and together ran up a slope where we had booked three taxis for a certain time. Once we were inside the cab, the driver looked at us in a funny way. We were all ecstatic and told him we had been to a hockey game, which was why we were sweating. The taxi left us outside the yard and we only had to wait for five minutes before the train came rolling by. Cameras started flashing, and as it happened, the train stopped at the middle of the bridge and remained there for ten minutes. After that, Alek turned to me and said: 'This is the best thing I've ever done, and the most fun.'"

Tony Skaff and Johanna Hallin

*See the whole train on the last page

> "I'm crying with pain, despair and sorrow. But the real loss of such a special ray of sunshine has been visited on the world by the one who took you…", Carola

Alek had a secret life, which did not show up on the train. His ex-girlfriend Carola, relates:

"When I first met Alek, he was lying on the floor in a friend's living-room, listening to a radio set between two channels, so that one bleep came after another. My friend said that it would be better if he chose one

Olaf and his good friend chilling in Poland at New Years day 2002.

Yxa by Olaf. The summer of 2002 was unusually hot and lay-ups were often visited.

Axa, a Stockholm commuter train by Olaf in 2002, part of four Whole Cars.

Yxa- Olafs very last piece done in Vienna in July 2002.

channel instead.

'But what the hell, this is like the best rave music!' said Alek and turned the sound up.

A few weeks later, I was on the most eventful date of my life. Alek and I met by accident in Märsta. After a while he asked me if I wanted to go to the train lay-up. Train lay-up? What was he talking about? I said yes, without thinking or understanding what we were going to do there. Of course I found out later that the guy wasn't like everybody else but I liked being with him anyway. Ten minutes and a few broken-in gates later, we stood there among the trains. Suddenly I saw a torch shining somewhere between the trains and a second later we hear voices crying and dogs barking. Of course we got away, me with pounding heart and he with a smile on his lips.

'Abou, get this, I was chased at the train yard with a girl!'

Alek was the first and greatest love of my life, a new member of our family. On weekends, Alek would put the key in the lock to my flat around four or five in the morning when his missions along the tracks were finished. Both my mother and I were equally worried every time. When Alek spent his summers in Poland I would count the weeks, days and hours until his return. He would send me letters telling me about the cool guys he had met and was writing with. Of course he'd also send photos of paintings he'd done for me. Since graffiti was his life, it became a part of mine. Sometimes he could sit at his desk sketching half the night while I just slept. When we travelled to Stockholm it was always for two reasons: I wanted to go shopping and Alek wanted to ride the train.

After a while, alek took me to a wall he said was legal where I made my first two attempts at painting. Alek said I had talent but was useless at shaking cans.

That Alek had talent above and beyond everybody is well known. When we were seventeen, eighteen, he promised me that he would stop making pieces the day he turned 20. I knew he wouldn't. He never made 21.

For me, and others around him, things have changed. I always counted on Alek, he would always be there, just as Olaf exists along the tracks. For him, nothing was hard or embarrassing and nothing was impossible. You do what you feel and don't care about the rest. With hindsight, we can say that Alek enjoyed life as few do. I'll always love Alek for his cool style, simple philosophy of life and charming interior – but I can never accept I'll never see him again."

Carola Ericsson

A tribute to Olaf by six close friends of his, Stockholm commuter train – July 2002

Dear Alek

You spread joy with your wit and view of life
Showed us what real love and friendship are
You will always be in our hearts

Hanna Pielecha
Poem written by Alek's mother for his obituary

Alek Pielecha 1981 – 2002

Mice in Berlin 1992.

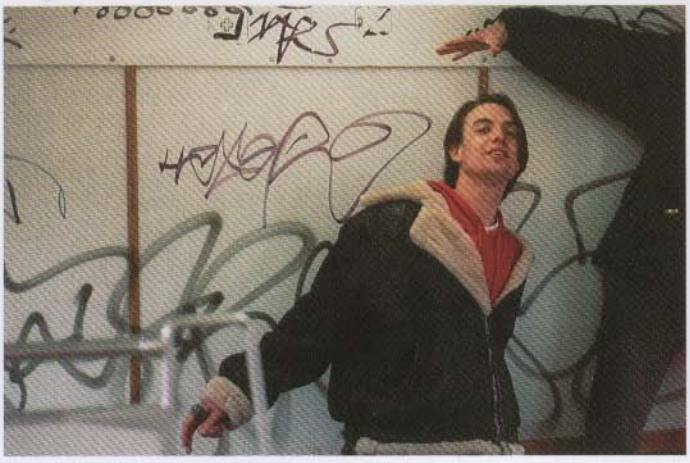
In memory of Mice

Mice or Micke as he was really named, died on September, 9th 2002. He was 30 years old. He had been a writer since the eighties and was well-known both in and outside of Sweden.

How to describe you to someone who never met you? You were a free thinker, a visionary with a wild imagination. My experience of you is that you had a good heart and a fine core. You wanted to do good, your intentions were good, you were always kind.
You believed in things, you had a faith – I was so proud of you that way. In a cold world where it often feels as though nobody believes in anything, you lived with big plans and an unbending belief in yourself and your projects. How refreshing and inspiring!

I must admit I sometimes thought some of your paintings were naïve, but in a nice way; that was part of your charm.
Over the years, there were a number of crazy adventures and paintings. You had your own different ideas: Many are those who have followed you and seen your little inventions and tinkerings. I remember our conversations and brainstorming sessions – you had a way with free association that always stimulated me.
It shouldn't be denied that you had your own inner problems and sometimes strayed from the path. But you battled on in your own way to find your place in your surroundings. We didn't talk much about that. Perhaps, out of respect for your friends, you didn't want to burden us, what do I know? It wouldn't have been a burden. I am only angry with myself for not having been there more.
I knew you for ten years. Thanks for the time we had. It feels incredibly sad and strange that you should no longer be with us.
You meant so much to me, and many others. You should know that you are missed by all of us.

Martin (Core)



Berlin commuter train 1992. Mice preparing for the insides.

Mice's invention, the Cantroler, 1998.

SOS – Malmoe 1992.

Jaws – Malmoe about 1992.

Mice – Malmoe 1993.

Mice – Malmoe 1996.

Mice – Malmoe 1998.

Mice – Malmoe about 1992.

Mice – Malmoe 1993.

Promis – Malmoe about 1993.

Graffpac by Mice and Core, Malmoe 1997.

Mice – Malmoe 1997.

Mice – Malmoe 1999.

Who could have predicted that early tags would lead to the kind of works the the members of F.X. Crew have painted in the Bronx in the last few years? Per and Dare 2002.

Moral Panics and the "Wars on Graffiti"

The future development of a new visual phenomenon, like writing, is in no way "obvious" or "natural" when it first appears. We learn to see and interpret a new visual phenomenon in part through a shared, public conversation with others over time. If it is true that many see and interpret writing in public spaces as an indication of dangerous criminal activity in an area, it is at least in part because they have been educated and persuaded to understand writing in that way.

This education process has been going on for the last quarter-century. Writing has unjustly attached to fears of the urban "boogie man", which often draw on the most outrageously racist stereotypes — the same types of fears that allow folks to question whether any group of young Latino or Black men are part of a criminal gang simply because they are hanging out together on the street.

These fears have been coddled and promoted in the New York Times and other public news media, in the programs and policies of elected public officials, and in popular film and television programs. Even in 1974, only a few year after writing began to appear in the public spaces of New York City, filmmakers and other folks with the means to create shared public understandings were associating spray paint and urban young people with the most brutal of crimes and a panic-stricken sense of public space.

As an example, have a look at the original Death Wish (1974) starring Charles Bronson, whose character served as a role model for Bernhard Goetz's crimes on the New York subways in 1984. Early in the film, you'll see a shot of a painted subway train as Bronson and his wife return to New York from a tropical vacation. The train is meant to convince you that the city is oppressive, undesirable, polluted and filthy. You'll also note, I'm sure, that just before the three thugs murder Bronson's wife and rape his daughter in their Upper West Side apartment, they use spray paint to mark up the stairwell and the walls. These thug-characters are in no way even remotely related to an accurate portrayal of writers, but how are those who have never met a writer or read anything that challenges these distorted associations to know?

Unfortunately, Death Wish is not unique in its portrayal of writers as "wilding" youths, as I will show below. With very few exceptions, writing in New York City has been publicly discussed as the "graffiti problem", to be dealt with through a "war on graffiti". This war follows in the footsteps of the "war on communism", the "war on poverty" and the "war on drugs". Does writing really belong in this line-up? Although there are many who see this art as a valuable and exciting part of cultural life, they have found no support for their views from public officials, major "news" vendors, or those folks who have access to movie production or the public airwaves.

Those who were around in the early 1970s will remember that the new writing on the walls was first presented in the Times as the "graffiti epidemic" or the "graffiti plague". In this way, writing was associated with horrible mass diseases in which large numbers of people get sick and die. As an alternative, some news vendors compared the writing in New York City to the old graffiti scratched in the walls of Pompeii, a city destroyed by the eruption of a volcano. These representations suggest that writing was a natural disaster for New York City, and that writing was threatening and deadly to the city's citizens. Writers themselves were portrayed in equally threatening ways, often as wild, mindless maniacs who were tearing down civilization as we know it. Mayor John Lindsay told the public press in the early 1970s that writers were mentally ill, and the called them "insecure cowards" who were looking

The early 80s, when the MTA painted a couple of the lines white and dubbed them the "Great White Fleet", is remembered by many writers as the "golden age". Photo: Martha Cooper.

for attention from their peers. I, for one, find it extremely ironic that a man who had just run for the Democratic presidential nomination would accuse others of being mentally ill because they were seeking public recognition.

This type of distortion cannot be simply laid at the feet of John Lindsay, nor was it confined to the early 1970s. For instance, the most extensive article that the Times printed on writing, which appeared in the early 1980s, followed the same line and argued that writers were violent and mentally unstable. The article was titled "The plague Years" (as though we were still living in the Middle Ages) and like everything in this newspaper except the editorial page, the article presented its information as the "truth". Rarely did the Times or any other newspaper interview a writer to gather its information, and if it did, it edited this information in very self-serving ways. On the other hand, the press releases of city officials on the topic of writing were quoted at length, and without the critical or cynical editing that was common when writers were interviewed. Where were the the questions about the mental status of government officials spending millions of public dollars each year on the "war on graffiti"? Instead, the public was educated to believe that writers were the barbarians at the gates of the new Rome, once again come to bring about the fall of western civilization... in New York City.

...we have been taught too see writing as a life-threatening vandalism created by mindless, mentally ill maniacs who are attempting to bring the city down.

One must admit that the meaning of the new writing was not obvious when it first appeared. Who could have predicted that early tags would lead to the kind of works the the members of F.X. Crew have painted in the Bronx in the last few years? But other kinds of "challenging" art have entered the major museums without going through the kind of treatment that writing has been subjected to. Go have a look at "Autumn Rhythm" (1950) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. If you haven't seen it before, it will look like a drunk has dripped and poured paint all over a canvas. In fact, Pollock was a drunk, and he did pour and drip paint all over his canvas. But don't get me wrong. I am in complete agreement with the mainstream of art historical criticism: "Autumn Rhythm" is one of the most important and beautiful works of the 20th century. Why would I think that? My eye has been educated to understand what Pollock was doing and why — I have been taught to see the importance of this work. Now it seems obvious to me: "Autumn Rhythm" is a masterpiece, no question. On the other hand, we have been taught too see writing as a life-threatening vandalism created by mindless, mentally ill maniacs who are attempting to bring the city down. There were innumerable opportunities throughout the history of writing to change the way it was perceived, to open up a more even and balanced conversation about what this new writing meant. The city government chose instead to construct this new writing as its enemy. It got what it asked for.

Despite the panic filled pronouncements and the enormous sums of public money spent, the first "war on graffiti" ended in a humiliating defeat for the city government and the MTA by 1974.

Fears of writing and writers, of plagues, epidemics, and mindless barbarians were replaced by fears of bankruptcy as New Yorkers braced themselves for austerity during the debt crisis of the mid-to-late 1970s. Very little reporting about writing in public spaces appeared in the newspapers and no new public campaigns were undertaken by the Beame administration, nor by Edward Koch during his first years in office. Of course, the trains were still running (barely) and people could still see the works there, but their was very little shared public discussion of what it meant for five years.

When the second "war on graffiti" began in the early 1980s, public officials and policy advisors turned to the supposed "emotional" effects writing was having on the average citizen. Writing supposedly made straphangers feel unsafe, as though the city and the subways were lawless and out of control. Asking whether New York City was "out of control" was indeed a valid question. Hospitals and libraries were closed, the police force was reduced, crime soared, the number of folks living in the streets exploded, youth unemployment set all-time record highs, whole block of the South Bronx were being burned on a daily basis, a black-out produced riots and looting, and the city continously teetered on the edge of bankruptcy for several years. These are just a few of the ways that New York City was "out of control" during these years. Centralized governmental authority, and even some of the more informal and private means of holding urban society together were only marginally performing their functions.

But nothing demonstrated the "out of control" situation in the city like the rattle-trap subway system, which had been allowed to fall into disrepair almost to the point of collapse. The subway literally holds the city together: if the system stops, 3 to 4 million folks have to find another way to get to work. In an effort to save money during the late 1970s, routine inspections and repairs were delayed until the equipment failed on the tracks, which meant that straphangers had to empty out of the car and catch the next (packed) train. Breakdowns became part of everyone's daily routine, along with frequent car fires, malfunctioning doors, and an incredible increase in derailments and collisions. TA President John Simpson held a press conferance to announce his resignation

© Jackson Pollock/BUS 2002.

Other kinds of "challenging" art have entered the major museums without going through the kind of treatment that writing has been subjected to. *One* by Jackson Pollock 1950.

in 1984, claiming that the job of rebuilding the subways was almost hopeless. As if to underscore that hopelessness, a train on the six line jumped the track during the press conference, and Simpson had to leave his resignation speech early to inspect the damage. When David Gunn interviewed for Simpson's job two months later, he characterized the task of rebuilding the subways as a "suicide mission". And to add insult to injury, the crime rate on the subway continued the upward climb that had begun almost 15 years earlier.

Mayor Ed Koch declared two different "wars on subway crime" in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The crime rate peaked in the subways in 1982 and 1983. During this period, public officials, business leaders, academics, and the major newspapers once again attempted to draft New Yorkers into another "war on graffiti". New Yorkers were informed that their fears were caused by the writing in the subways and on the public walls. Forget the debt crisis, forget the unemployment, forget the suffering of the homeless (you might be next), forget the drastic cuts in social services, forget the cuts in the sanitation and the police forces. Forget the unpredictable and often unsafe subways that barely got folks to work. Forget that public polls at this time barely even registered graffiti as a public concern, on the subways or off. Whether New Yorkers knew it or not, or even believed it or not, their public officials, with the happy assistance of the city's newspapers, television and radio stations, told them that they should see writing as the "true" sign that New York City was out of control.

To blame writing for the fears of the city dwellers, rather than the enormous numbers of real problems that they actually faced, was a cynical ploy to deflect some tough questions about the city government itself. For instance, New Yorkers might legitimately ask why their government had allowed the city's life-line, the subway system to collapse. Further, why should New Yorkers now believe that if they once again put their trust in their government, everything would be "alright"? How had things gotten so "out of control" in the first place? Maybe writers had done all this?

The question is:
Did the removal of writing from the trains make New Yorkers feel safe?

Business leaders who held Koch's ear were concerned during the early 1980s because the entire planet was aware of the city's financial problems, and they were afraid that the crisis would adversely affect the business climate. Costs of city services had be kept to a minimum if the crisis was to ever end, and they feared that New Yorkers had become accustomed to living with less, and were now passive in the face of daily problems, such as sanitation. If New Yorkers didn't "pitch in" and help keep the city clean, their passivity would drive the cost of sanitation services up. So an anti-litter campaign was mounted at about the same time as the second "war on graffiti", and the two issues, litter and graffiti, were explicitly linked in the public press.

All of this was part of the city government's attempt to push some of the responsibility for New York City's "business image" onto the average citizen. And this again is a cynical ploy to dodge some more important and tougher questions. For instance, one might have wanted to ask why "business" should not shoulder a larger share of this burden, since any real profits generated by these efforts will end up in their pockets.

In this second "war", New Yorkers were once again directed to take note and spend their tax money on the "graffiti problem". Nineteen subway storage yards were fenced at a cost of $25 million, the TA Police vandal squad was befeed up, over 2000 new cars were purchased with stainless-steel exteriors to make "cleaning" easier, and the car cleaning staff on the subways was tripled. Of course, the costs of most of these projects were never made public, but if we assume that the costs in the early 1970s and the currently-reported costs are correct, we can estimate that the New Yorkers were asked to spend somewhere between $250,000,000 and $500,000,000 in the "wars on graffiti".

The question is: did the removal of writing from the trains make New Yorkers feel safe? Did they feel like centralized governmental authority was now "in control"? If they listened to and believed those "news" sources that compared writing to plagues, epidemics, foreign invasions, and that told them that writers were mentally-ill maniacs, barbarians, and isidious psychological terrorists, then there was no reason to feel

By refusing to compromise and discuss with writing culture, the city government bear part of the responsibility for the popularization of bombers as urban heroes among youth.

safe. In 1986, one half of the entire subway fleet had no writing on it, and the last painted cars left the track a little more than two years later (May 1989). However, there was no significant change in crime rate on the subways until the early 1990s. At this time, on a completely "graffiti free" subway system, the subway crime rate reached an all-time high. How could this be?

Were folks less afraid? Was there lesser fear now that the writing was gone? The city government, as in many other cases, had "gone to war" on a "problem" that was completely unrelated to the issue at hand. Yes, they had successfully "wiped out graffiti". But if anyone felt safe as a result, I have to ask why. The correlation between writing and subway crime did not pass the test.

Perhaps it is not crime that we are all afraid of anyway. The "war on graffiti" is part of a long tradition of "wars on _____". When there is a "war on ____", we know who will fill in that blank, right? Think about the "war on poverty" (now the "war on the poor"), the "war on drugs", the "war on teen pregnancy", the "war on gangs", the "war on crime". It's the "boogie man" (sometimes, but rarely, the boogie woman) who fills in that blank. In New York City, that "boogie man" image has been commonly understood to be an urban youth from a poor neighborhood, usually a youth of color, at least since the moral panics about gangs in the late 1950s. Bernhard Goetz (posterboy for U.S. reactionary whites), the city government, the MTA, and the news media have drawn upon and created these widespread fears of dark-skinned, lurking criminals in the claustrophobic subways, and made them appear to be "common sense" by coddling them and repeating them. Aside from the racial connotations, these fears also draw out and help to create generational conflict and polarization. There is a widespread feeling among "adults" in the U.S. that young people are unworthy of serious consideration as citizens, particularly if they are (forced to) communicate their desires in illegal, indirect, or obscure ways that can't be ripped off and turned into the last "fad" down the mall.

It is in perfect keeping with the environment of New York that an art built around the name would appear in this city.

We were instructed on how to "read" writing as a threat. But if citizens are able to "read" the urban environment, then maybe they have been reading the pervasive injustices within U.S. central cities that have existed for some time now. Perhaps the reason that some citizens may have been willing to accept writing as a sign of lawlessness is because lawlessness was everywhere: in the real estate markets that created millions of homeless, in the exportation of jobs to suburban areas and to other nations, in the lowering of real wages so that everyone must work more to earn less, in the "war on drugs" which targeted most the most vulnerable populations while allowing the U.S. government to help reactionaries in the southern hemisphere to import the most addictive drugs in the history of humanity. Yep, plenty of lawlessness in these times.

In any case, New Yorkers were constantly coached by their public officials and the city's major news vendors to think that writing was a terrifying and dangerous public menace that had to be "wiped out" in order to protect them from the "outsiders" who were writing in public spaces. But of course, writers are not "outsiders" at all — they are New Yorkers. Aesthetics, power and place are closely related (ever notice how most skyscrapers look alike?), and New York is nothing if not a world arena for spectacularized naming in public space. The signs on Broadway and Times Square are almost national landmarks, akin to Mount Rushmore or the Grand Canyon. Public spaces are saturated with advertising, howling out to pay attention to Guess, or Nike, or Coke. Folks come from all over the planet expecting to see "the bright lights" of New York City, which usually spell out some entertainer's or corporation's name. It is in perfect keeping with the environment of New York that an art built around the name would appear in this city. Second, New York City has been an important location for the creation of new youth cultures and practices during the last half century. NYC was important in the development of jazz, doo-wop, all sorts of dances and fashions, rock and roll, hippie-cool, the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, Students for a Democratic Society, gangs, and a long list of other

When the buff was built in the late 1970s, it succeded only in smeraing and fading the works on the trains, it solved the problem of too-little space on the subways. Photo: Slin & Merk.

stuff, to say nothing of the hip hop revolution that has now taken the planet by storm.

Writing is thus a part of a long tradition of new youth practices to appear in the humble village of NYC. Finally, New York City became the Art Capital Of The World after World War 2, and has been the primary site for discussions about what art is, what the new art will be, and what that art will mean in the larger scheme of things. Every major art magazine has a NYC office, the hundreds of museums and galleries are among the city's major tourist attractions, and (almost) every aspiring young painter around the country wants to have a New York show. Is it any wonder that a new artistic youth culture movement would develop in this town? Writing is very much a "New York" thing, very much an "insiders" art, very much a part of its hometown environment.

But writing is in dialogue with its environment in a more ironic way. Writing on the subways and the public walls has received a great deal of help from the city government and the MTA throughout the history, although this was never intended. The city government, the MTA, and their allies in the media have done all they can to convince New Yorkers that writing is a threat to their continued existence, but these organizations have also been very helpful in promoting the way that writing is practiced. For instance, when the MTA repainted the entire fleet in an attempt to demoralize writers in the early 1970s, the new "blank" spaces that resulted greatly assisted the development of the whole-car masterpiece.

When the family court decided to "teach writers a lesson" by sentencing them to wipe their work off of the subways, writers used this as an opportunity to create new connections to writers in other boroughs. When the buff was built in the late 1970s, at a cost of $25 millions, and succeded only in smeraing and fading the works on the trains, it solved the problem of too-little space on the subways again. The photography of Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper documents an incredible surge of creativity on the trains during this time. The early 1980s, when the MTA painted a couple of the lines white and dubbed them the "Great White Fleet", is remembered by many writers as the "golden age".

Aside from this unintended assistance to the aesthetic development of writing, the city government and the MTA also helped to shape the self-image of writers. Although a kind of adventuring has traditionally been a part of urban youth culture, the way in which writers were pursued by the Transit Police transformed writing into an intricate game of cat and mouse, a game that writers have consistently won. By the early 1970s, writing became a thrilling and dangerous encounter with authority. The TA has enthusiastically and continually played along with this game, and has unintentionally promoted a more ardent outlaw stance among some writers.

Policing tactics have also worked to push writers away from piecing. Placing tags and masterpieces of all qualities in the same category and calling it all "vandalism" has ensured the most time-consuming and complex works are closed off from public spaces. Even writers with letters of permission to paint legal walls are frequently picked up and harassed. This type of harassment was foreshadowed during the last few years as the public spaces that have traditionally been left to writers, like schoolyards and the undersides of bridges, were closed down and policed. Police authorities publicly question the legitimacy of places like the Phun Phactory, which provides writers with legal walls where large numbers of pieces can be created and viewed together, rejecting these projects because it is thought to "promote vandalism". The city government has maintained a dogmatic, zero-tolerance stance and a clear, absolute rejection of any consideration of writing as a "legal" art.

> There is a widespread feeling that young people are unworthy of serious consideration as citizens, particularly if they communicate their desires in illegal or obscure ways that can't be ripped off and turned into the last "fad" down the mall.

And in that rigid rejection, they have created the perfect situation for realizing their worst fantasies — the street bomber, who has little regard for the city or the people in it, who delights in the wholesale bombing of streets, trains, rooftops, police cars, and even other writers' masterpieces. By adopting the most dogmatic and narrow stance, and refusing to see any point of compromise or discussion with writing culture, the city government must bear part of the responsibility for the rise of street bombing in New York City and the popularization of bombers as urban heroes among youth. The city has helped to create and promote the practice that it hates the most. And this conveninently leads to yet another "war".

As a cultural historian, I am concerned with how we create shared memories. I ask myself how writing will be remebered, knowing that the shared meanings of the past will help to guide our future actions as a collective body. The memories that attempt to place writers on the "outside" of urban culture and society do not work. Clearly, if writers were attempting to scare us, they would use the many, more "direct "methods at their disposal. My advice to New Yorkers is to see how lucky you are, see how the rest of the world envies you, and learn to read the writing on the walls for what it is truly saying to you. And the next time a smiling city government attempts to draft you into a new "war on graffiti": burn your draft card!

Joe Austin

This article has previously been printed in the spring 1997 issue of Elementary Magazine.

Joe Austin is an assistant professor in the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University and the author of "Taking the Train: How Graffiti Became an Urban Crisis in New York City". Contact him at **jaustin@bgnet.bgsu.edu**.

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STOCKHOLM SUBWAY

Turn...

..Que...

..Luo – 2002

Ape, Fame – Running through Stockholm City, 2002

Reb – 2002

Fame – 2002

More than three window down whole cars on the new type of subway in Stockholm, made by Hook, Clis, Axa, 7dc, Blady, Oidor, Dath, 2002

1st caught in action, Stockholm 2002

Hook, a one man Whole Car on the old type of subway in Stockholm 2002

Ode , Hook – 2002

Ape! – 2002

Vim – 2002

Mbay...

..Reb – 2002

Casias, Skar – 2002

STOCKHOLM WALLS

Unik – 2002

Off – 2002

Bye – 2002

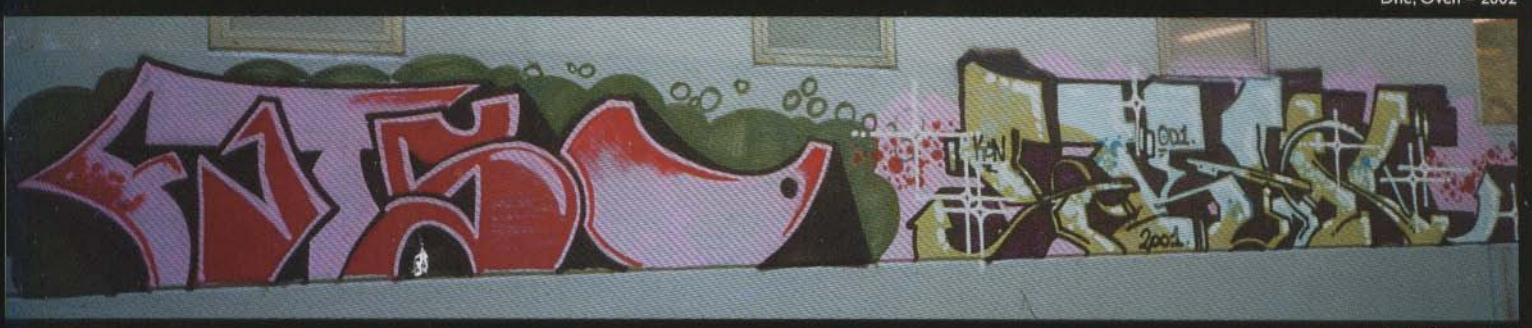
Pnut – 2002

Rane – 2001

Polar, Jeks – 2002

Abos, Grey – 2002

Dne, Oven – 2002



Fatso, Sken – 2001

Kurir – 2002

Moe – 2002

Punk, on Gothenburgs only undergoround tramstation – 2002

GOTHENBURG

Soul – 2002

Ollio, Zeray – 2002

Sera – 2002

Fly – 2002

Amebix, Winter, Jinx – 2002

Punk, Bingo, Character by Punk – 2002

Scuba...

...Kid...

Oban, Ryan – 2002

...Riks – 2002

Punk, Aero – 2002

Ape, Ribe, Plåster, Aero – 2002

Fire – 2002

Igs, Igs – 2002

F-ups, Fame – 2002

Plåster, 1 Maj – 2002

F-ups, F-ups – 2002

Zoom, X-man, Fame, Aero, Qiter – 2002

Casio, Oven – 2002

Grey, Clis – 2002

STOCKHOLM COMMUTER TRAINS

Mar, Vims – 2002

Fher – 2002

Pms – 2002

Kue – 2002

Uzi on one of the danish trains serving as commuter trains in Stockholm, 2002

Meizl, Al – 2002

Oven, Casio – 2002

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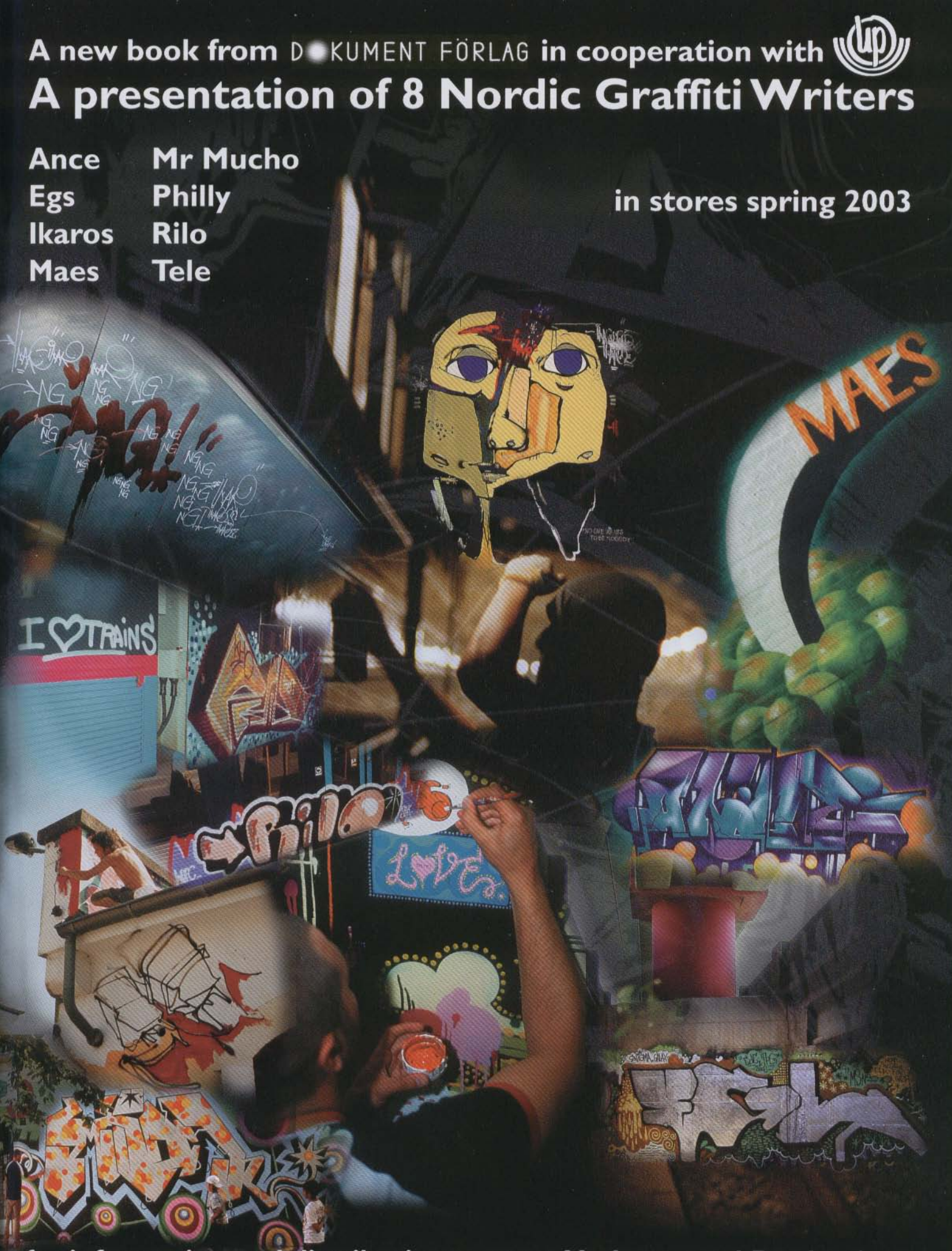

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Arcad, Fuksh 2002

UPPSALA WALLS

Casan, 2002

Ozek, Rizla 2002

Rick, 2002

Ausims 2002

Ringo 2002

Befria Palestina, 2002

Ozek, Knas 2002

Cake, Rider 2002

Rider, Rizla 2002

Frankenstein, 2002

Soye 2002

Ringo, 2002

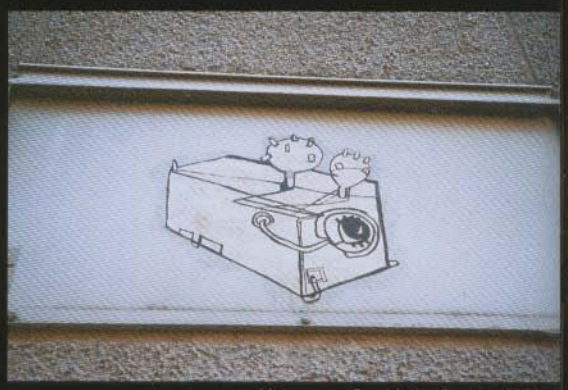
Ruskig, Dekis 2002

Hotel – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

IN THE STREETS

Hotel, Ziggy – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

Kegre – Copenhagen, Denmark2002



Unknown – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

Toaster – Amsterdam, Holland 2002

Zeray, Hotel – Stockholm, Sweden2002

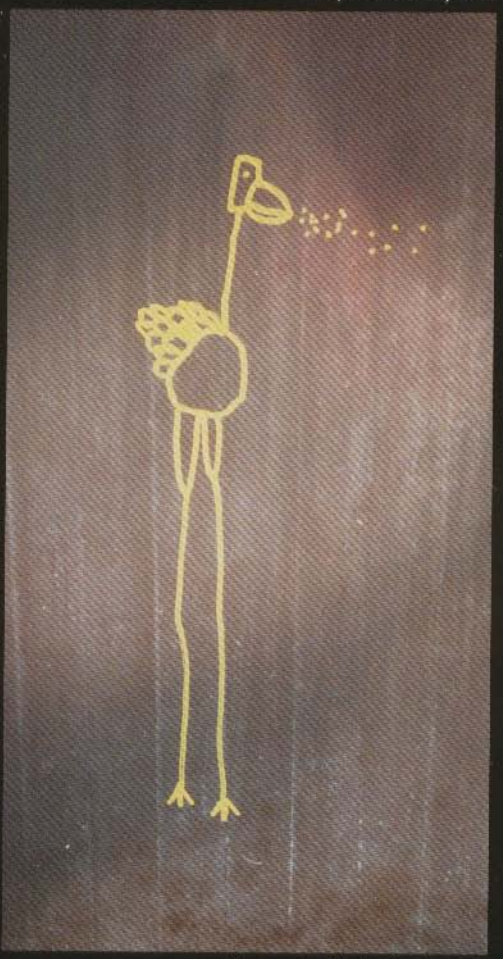
Poch – Rennes, France 2000

Melt – Bourdeaux, France 2002

Grey – Milano, Italy 2002

Unknown – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

Unknown somewhere in Europe



Kropp – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

Asp - Stockholm, Sweden 2002

D-cent – Holland, 2002

Adams, Made, Akay – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

Mr Silen – Germany, 2002

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Ferl – Vienna, Austria 2002

Tron – Roma, Italy 2002

Khc – Berlin, Germany 2002

EUROPEAN SUBWAYS

Iron – Brussels, Belgium 2002

Sand – Milano, Italy 2002

Dsf – Hamburg, Germany 2002

Tve – Madrid, Spain 2002

Rocks – Milano, Italy 2002

Irok...

...Suker – Vienna, Austria 2002

Chob, London – Bologna, Italy 2002

EUROPEAN TRAINS

Dsf – Hamburg, Germany 2002

Taylor – France 2002

End – Warszaw, Poland 2002

Reps – Roma, Italy 2002

Skor, Risoe – Dresden, Germany 2002

Spud – Cologne, Germany 2002

Besd – Dresden, Germany 2001

Cafe – Holland 2002

Thek – Holland 2002

Cent – Barcelona, Spain 2002

La Mano – Barcelona, Spain 2001

Monzterz Of Art – Basel, Switzerland 2002

Ångest, Ruskig – Malmoe, 2002

Ruskig, Ångest – Gothenburg 2002

Ruskig Ångest exhibition

The old foxes Ruskig and Ångest, who have both been writing since the mid-80s, spent the summer and autumn painting ten giant walls in different Swedish locations. Amongst others, they have been active in Uppsala, Umeå, Gothenburg, Malmö and Stockholm.

The exhibition is more than just that. It also contains collages, photos, drawings, permits, videos and, of course, photographs of the paintings. The exhibition opened at the Art Hall in Mora on November ninth, and will then tour round Sweden. For more information, see http://www.ruskig.com. Ruskig describes the exhibition as a long awaited cooperation together with Ångest.

– I think that the exhibition shows the functions of society today. Through graffiti we're questioning politics, the family, relationships, the media, the public and privat spheres, individuality, cooperation, diversion/destruction, painting, prejudices.

Graffiti is an aestethic reaction of society. And it's fun as well!

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Antro – Madrid, Spain 2002

Dean, Smash – Basel, Switzerland 2002

Fra 32 – Pisa, Italy 2002

Two times Nfe , this piece is situated close to the central station – Copenhagen, Denmark 2002

EUROPEAN WALLS

Cole, Smoe, Mone, Disk, Size – Copenhagen, Denmark 2002

Form, Supe...

...Logoe – Hamburg, Germany 2002

Sabe – Copenhagen, Denmark 2002

Pois...

...Phoe – Prag, Czech Republic 2002

Orne, Retro – Bordeaux, France 2002

Sky´s The Limit – Copenhagen, Denmark 2002

Fem, Leon, Noms, Fusk – Malmoe, Sweden 2002

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Eight cars Whole Train made on the Stockholm subway in November 2001, by Ape, Roll, Milk, Hook, Ond, Lgon...

...Yxa, Clis, Tres, Ida, Glue

Kill All Toys – Umea, Sweden 2002

Moas – Stockholm, Sweden 2002

Leon – Malmoe, Sweden 2002